

## DECLARATION

I, Matthew T. Greer, declare and state as follows:

I am a Special Agent with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and have been so employed since March of 2008. I have been assigned to the Raleigh District Office (DO) since May of 2017. I have received extensive training in the area of identifying violations of the Controlled Substance Act, Title 21, and other related offenses.

I have participated in the execution of federal and state search warrants resulting in the seizure of controlled substances, records associated with narcotics trafficking, United States currency (USC) and assets purchased with the proceeds of illicit controlled substances. I have worked with, and recruited numerous informants and interviewed defendants who have been involved in the orchestration of illegal drug trafficking activities. I have testified in proceedings in federal and state court. I have been the affiant on federal search warrant applications and also directed multiple Title III investigations.

The following facts detail the probable cause for the forfeiture of the following property:

- \$36,999.00 in U.S. Currency (USC) seized from Ramon Odalis RODRIGUEZ Cabrera on May 14, 2022

Based on the investigation of the above-mentioned person, the following is known to be true:

### I. BACKGROUND OF THE INVESTIGATION

This investigation of a criminal trafficking organization operating throughout the east coast of the United States was initiated in 2019, and has, thus far, resulted in seizures of USC in excess of \$1,100,000.00. Transportation cells of this organization utilize the interstate highway system to move controlled substances, contraband cigarettes, and bulk amounts of U.S. currency between North Carolina and the northeastern United States. Based on this investigation, a transportation cell of this organization operating between North Carolina and Connecticut was identified. Multiple law enforcement encounters with members of this cell are detailed below, culminating in the seizure of the subject currency.

### II. MAY 12, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

On May 12, 2021, pursuant to observations of violations of North Carolina Vehicle and Traffic Law, North Carolina Highway Patrol (NCHP) Trooper Tyler Parrott conducted a traffic stop of a black Nissan NV van bearing North Carolina registration TDN 7743 that was traveling southbound on Interstate 85 in Granville County. The driver was identified as Yuniur Rafael DIAZ Gonzalez and the passenger was identified as Amauri Gustavo RODRIGUEZ. DIAZ Gonzalez identified the owner of the vehicle as Maricelis AYUSO. DIAZ Gonzalez stated that they were driving from Richmond, VA to Burlington, NC. DIAZ Gonzalez provided his address as High Point, NC. Upon questioning by Trooper Parrott,

GOVERNMENT  
EXHIBIT  
A

passenger RODRIGUEZ also stated that the owner of the vehicle was "Maricelis". However, when asked by Trooper Parrott where they were coming from, RODRIGUEZ responded, "Connecticut". RODRIGUEZ's address was provided as Bridgeport, CT. DIAZ GONZALEZ's address in High Point, NC is owned by Fracily Jose RODRIGUEZ, according to public database records. Fracily Jose RODRIGUEZ was previously identified in this investigation pursuant to being the passenger of a vehicle that was the subject of a vehicle stop by the Maryland State Police. This vehicle stop was the result of intelligence passed from the Raleigh DO and resulted in the seizure of 4700 cartons of contraband cigarettes.

Trooper Parrott asked if there were any illegal items or large amounts of currency in the vehicle. DIAZ Gonzalez responded in the negative. Trooper Parrott then asked for, and received, verbal and written consent to search the van. During the search of the van, Trooper Parrott observed air fresheners, boxes of baking soda, and cleaning supplies. Under the passenger seat, Trooper Parrott located two plastic bags filled with United States currency (USC). Dryer sheets were observed in the bags containing the rubber-banded and stacked USC. After being confronted with the USC found inside the van, DIAZ Gonzalez stated that the USC did not belong to him, and that it belonged to a church that DIAZ Gonzalez did not identify by name. DIAZ Gonzalez later explained that the USC belonged to Maricelis AYUSO. A registration inquiry confirmed that the registrant of the vehicle was AYUSO. The USC was seized by NCHP as suspected illicit proceeds. A subsequent official counting determined the sum of the seized currency to be \$111,664.00. This seizure was not contested by DIAZ GONZALEZ or any other individual and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

### III. MAY 17, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

On May 17, 2021, on Interstate 85 in Granville County, NC, and pursuant to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, NCHP Trooper Parrott again conducted a traffic stop of the black Nissan NV van bearing North Carolina registration TDN 7743. The operator of the vehicle was the registrant, AYUSO. AYUSO's North Carolina driver's license provided an address of Burlington, NC. The passenger was identified as Antonio CONTRERAS. CONTRERAS's North Carolina driver's license provided a different address in Burlington, NC. AYUSO stated that she was the owner of the vehicle. When asked by Trooper Parrott, AYUSO denied the presence of controlled substances, illegal items, or any large sums of USC in the vehicle. When questioned by Trooper Parrott, CONTRERAS stated that they were traveling from New York. A K-9 was deployed on the vehicle and alerted to the presence of the odor of controlled substances. A probable cause search was conducted, and, again, Trooper Parrott located baking soda, air fresheners, and cleaning supplies in the van. Behind the driver's seat, NCHP personnel located two (2) bags that contained bundled USC wrapped in plastic and duct tape. In contrast to her previous denial of the presence of large amounts of USC, and subsequent to the finding of the USC by the NCHP, AYUSO stated that the USC was proceeds from the sale of a convenience store in New York. The address of the store was provided as "1549 Bushwick". AYUSO provided additional vague and conflicting statements regarding the origins of the USC. The USC was seized as suspected illicit proceeds by NCHP. A subsequent official counting determined the sum of the seized currency to be \$66,790.00. The seizure was not contested by CONTRERAS, AYUSO, or any other individual, and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

Law enforcement databases provided the following information about Antonio CONTRERAS, AYUSO's passenger during the May 17, 2021 traffic stop conducted by the NCHP. On April 12, 2019, CONTRERAS was detained by members of the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF) in the Bronx, NY. CONTRERAS was the driver of a Ford F-150 vehicle bearing Connecticut registration C105257 that delivered \$59,000.00 USC to a law enforcement officer working in an undercover capacity as a multi-kilogram cocaine supplier. CONTRERAS's passenger, Stanley "EL MENOR" DIAS Azor was arrested at this location, and the USC was seized by NYDETF Group T-33. Both CONTRERAS and DIAZ Azor provided addresses in Bridgeport, CT. A registration inquiry was conducted on the Ford F-150. The registrant was confirmed to be Eagle United Chaplin. The registrant's address was provided as Norwalk, CT.

Additionally, banking documents were located in the vehicle which identified AYUSO and Lorenzo SANTOS as co-owners of financial accounts at Wells Fargo. Database inquiries indicate that Lorenzo SANTOS is related to Rafael SANTOS Munoz. SANTOS Munoz was convicted of cigarette trafficking offenses in Pennsylvania in 2019. Like Maricelis AYUSO, public database inquiries indicate that SANTOS Munoz has multiple addresses in Connecticut, Georgia, and North Carolina.

#### IV. JUNE 09, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

On June 09, 2021, subsequent to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, in the vicinity of mile marker 204 in the southbound lane of Interstate 85, NCHP Trooper Tyler Parrott conducted a traffic stop of a white Ford Transit van bearing North Carolina registration JAY 2871. The operator of the vehicle was identified via his North Carolina driver's license as Yordan MARTINEZ Perez. MARTINEZ Perez admitted to being in possession of a large amount of USC. A consent search of the vehicle resulted in the location of an undetermined amount of USC. MARTINEZ Perez denied being the owner of the USC, and stated that the USC belonged to the owners of La Sirena #1 Store, a business located at 2609 Randleman Road, Greensboro, NC. Trooper Parrott then seized the USC. A subsequent official counting determined the sum of the seized USC to be \$71,350.00.

Public database inquiries identified convicted cigarette trafficker Rafael SANTOS Munoz and his wife Eldia DILONE as the owners of LA SIRENA #1.

The seized USC was not contested by MARTINEZ Perez, Santos Munoz, DILONE or any other individuals, and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

#### V. JULY 07, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

On July 27, 2021, pursuant to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, in Vance County, NC, North Carolina Highway Patrol (NCHP) Trooper Parrott conducted a vehicle stop of a Chrysler Pacifica bearing Florida registration AFTJ34. A registration inquiry indicated that the Chrysler Pacifica was a rented vehicle. Trooper Parrott approached the Chrysler Pacifica. Trooper Parrott detected the odor of marijuana emanating from the vehicle as he made contact with its occupants. The driver was identified via his Connecticut driver's license as Amauri Gustavo RODRIGUEZ and the passenger was identified via his Connecticut driver learning permit as Raul Anthony LOZADA. Upon

questioning regarding the odor of marijuana, LOZADA turned over a small plastic bag containing approximately 10 grams of a substance that resembled the texture, color, and odor of marijuana. Trooper Parrott placed the occupants of the Chrysler Pacifica in his patrol vehicle while he conducted a probable cause search of the Chrysler Pacifica. While Trooper Parrott was conducting the search, his patrol vehicle recorded statements made by RODRIGUEZ. RODRIGUEZ stated, in sum and substance, that Trooper Parrott had previously pulled him over and that he (Trooper Parrott) was going to take the currency from him.

RODRIGUEZ was referencing the May 12, 2021 vehicle stop detailed in Section II of this declaration, which resulted in the seizure of \$111,664.00.

Pursuant to the search of the Chrysler Pacifica, Trooper Parrott located a large amount of bundled USC in the vehicle's center console. The USC was seized as suspected illicit proceeds and an official counting later determined the sum of the USC to be \$64,185.00.

Investigation determined that Marcelina JIMENEZ was the renter of the Chrysler Pacifica, and the mother of RODRIGUEZ. Like other members of this criminal trafficking organization, JIMENEZ has addresses in both North Carolina and Connecticut. JIMENEZ shares a Bridgeport, CT address with RODRIGUEZ. Additionally, JIMENEZ is the registrant of two vehicles registered at the Burlington, NC address associated with Antonio CONTRERAS from the May 17, 2021 vehicle stop detailed in Section III of this declaration, which resulted in the seizure of \$66,790.00.

The seized USC was not contested by RODRIGUEZ, LOZADA, JIMENEZ, or any other individual and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

#### VI. AUGUST 23, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

Pursuant to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, a Chrysler Town and Country minivan bearing North Carolina registration JEX 5390 was the subject of a traffic stop conducted by the NCHP in the vicinity of mile marker 200 on Interstate 85 in Granville County, NC 4. The driver and registrant of the vehicle was identified as Marcelina JIMENEZ via her Connecticut driver's license. The vehicle's registration address was Burlington, NC. The passenger was identified as Yunior R. DIAZ Gonzalez via his Dominican Republic passport.

DIAZ Gonzalez was previously documented as the driver of the Nissan NV that was carrying \$111,664.00 USC that was seized by NCHP in May 2021 and documented in Section II of this declaration. Marcelina JIMENEZ's son, Amauri G. RODRIGUEZ was the passenger of that vehicle, and was also the subject of the traffic stop conducted on July 07, 2021 that resulted in the seizure of \$64,185.00 USC which was documented in Section V of this declaration.

The Burlington, NC address where the Chrysler minivan was registered was previously identified as the address of Antonio CONTRERAS, the passenger in the same Nissan NV that was carrying \$66,790.00 that was also seized by the NCHP, which was documented under Section III of this declaration.



A K-9 unit was deployed on the vehicle and alerted to the presence of the odor of controlled substances. A subsequent search of the vehicle located an after-market installed concealed compartment located within the floorboard behind the front seat. NCHP accessed the concealed compartment and removed an undetermined amount of USC. JIMENEZ stated that she had no knowledge of the concealed compartment in the vehicle nor of its contents. JIMENEZ stated that her son had access to the vehicle and that he must have had it installed in order to hide USC. The USC was seized and a subsequent official counting of the USC determined the amount to be \$14,580.00.

JIMENEZ acknowledged that her son, Amauri G. RODRIGUEZ, had USC seized "last month" in North Carolina. JIMENEZ also stated that JIMENEZ stated that her other son, Eduardo JIMENEZ was murdered in Connecticut in 2020.

Subsequent investigation determined that, on April 02, 2020, Eduardo JIMENEZ, was found shot multiple times in the 400 block of Trumbull Avenue in Bridgeport, CT. He was pronounced dead after being transported to St. Vincent's Hospital. Eduardo JIMENEZ had a criminal history that included a 2018 arrest by the New York State Police (NYSP). Eduardo JIMENEZ was charged with third degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, pursuant to NYSP troopers locating approximately an ounce of cocaine in the vehicle that Eduardo JIMENEZ was operating. Eduardo JIMENEZ was also previously arrested by Bridgeport (CT) Police and charged with criminal possession of a firearm, possession of an assault weapon, possession of a weapon in a motor vehicle, and interfering with police. The semi-automatic 7.62 rifle that was the subject of these charges was located in Marcelina JIMENEZ's registered vehicle. Also, Eduardo JIMENEZ was arrested previously for multiple assaults on police officers.

Marcelina JIMENEZ repeatedly stated that she wanted to "make a deal". JIMENEZ stated that she had seen people with a lot of money in Burlington, NC. When asked for additional details regarding the location of this activity she stated that it was in the vicinity of her brother's neighborhood in Burlington, but she could not be more specific because she did not know the area well. JIMENEZ stated that she had seen amounts approximating \$85,000.00 - \$100,000.00. When asked who she had seen in possession of these large amounts of USC, JIMENEZ replied, "Rafi". JIMENEZ stated that she had also observed Rafi's brother "Nao" in possession of large amounts of USC. JIMENEZ stated that "Rafi" lived in Greensboro and "Nao" lived in Burlington. As previously noted in this declaration, Rafael SANTOS Munoz of Greensboro, NC, has been linked to this investigation via statements made by couriers, and evidence obtained during lawful searches of vehicles utilized by this organization.

The seized USC was not contested by DIAZ Gonzalez, JIMENEZ, or any other individual and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

VII. NOVEMBER 02, 2021 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL

On November 02, 2021, pursuant to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, in Warren County, NC, NCHP Trooper Knight conducted a stop of a Dodge Ram pickup truck bearing North Carolina registration RBN 6135. Upon Trooper Knight making contact with the occupants of the vehicle, the driver was identified as Yordan MARTINEZ Perez via his North Carolina driver's license.

The registered address of this vehicle was provided as the same Burlington, NC as the Chrysler minivan involved in the August 23, 2021 vehicle stop. Trooper Parrott observed that there were multiple cell phones, air fresheners, and blankets in plain view inside the vehicle. Trp. Parrott noted that there did not appear to be any luggage or suitcases in the vehicle.

Both MARTINEZ Perez and the registrant address were familiar to NCHP personnel. MARTINEZ Perez was the subject of a vehicle stop on June 09, 2021 which resulted in the seizure of \$64,185.00 USC and which is detailed in Section IV in this declaration.

Trooper Knight subsequently deployed a K9 unit on the vehicle. The K9 unit positively alerted to the presence of the odor of controlled substances on the vehicle. A search of the vehicle located receipts and other documentation of transactions involving other members of this criminal trafficking organization that had been identified via previous traffic stops which had resulted in seizures of bulk USC. Also located during this search were screwdrivers, and small lightbulbs commonly used in vehicle taillight fixtures. Tooling marks were then observed on the right taillight area, and the left taillight fixture covering appeared to be loose and missing a screw. NCHP personnel removed the taillight coverings and located bulk amounts of USC in voids that had been created by cutting into the frame of the vehicle and installing foam to create concealed compartments.

The USC was seized by NCHP personnel as suspected illicit proceeds. A subsequent official counting determined the amount to be \$54,126.00. The seized USC was not contested by MARTINEZ Perez or any other individual and has since been forfeited to the United States government.

#### VIII. APRIL 26, 2022 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE VIRGINIA STATE POLICE

On April 26, 2022, in Virgilina, VA, pursuant to observations of violations of Commonwealth of Virginia vehicle and traffic laws, Virginia State Police (VSP) personnel conducted a vehicle stop of a Chrysler Pacifica bearing New York registration GRB 4221. After approaching the Chrysler Pacifica, pursuant to the vehicle stop, VSP personnel identified Yunior DIAZ Gonzalez as the driver and Marcelina JIMENEZ as the passenger. The vehicle was confirmed to have been rented.

A K-9 alerted to the presence of the odor of controlled substances on the vehicle. A probable cause search was conducted by VSP personnel which resulted in the location of bundles of USC scattered throughout the passenger compartment of the vehicle.

JIMENEZ made incriminating statements about the nature and origins of the USC, and stated that she is a cigarette trafficker, but not a drug trafficker, and related to VSP personnel that, despite the recent law enforcement seizures of USC, her organization continues to successfully transport much more bulk USC than law enforcement interdicts. At this time, the USC was seized by VSP personnel as suspected illicit proceeds. A subsequent official counting of the USC determined the amount to be \$66,302.00. The seized USC has not been contested by DIAZ Gonzalez or JIMENEZ or any other individual.

DIAZ Gonzalez and JIMENEZ were previously the subject of vehicle stops that resulted in seizures of bulk USC that were conducted by the NCHP which are detailed in this declaration in Section II and

Section VI. Additionally, JIMENEZ was the renter of a vehicle stopped by NCHP that also resulted in a seizure of USC and detailed in this declaration in Section V.

IX. MAY 14, 2022 VEHICLE STOP CONDUCTED BY THE GRANVILLE COUNTY (NC) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

On May 14, 2022, pursuant to observed violations of North Carolina vehicle and traffic law, Granville County (NC) Sheriff's Office (GCSO) personnel conducted a vehicle stop of a 2011 White Toyota Avalon Sedan bearing Pennsylvania registration HLW0242. Upon GCSO Lt. Paschall making contact with the vehicle's operator, the operator identified himself as Yunior Rafael DIAZ Gonzalez, via a Dominican Republic identification card. The vehicle's passenger was identified via a state of Pennsylvania identification card as Ramon Odalis RODRIGUEZ Cabrera. The vehicle was registered to a third party, Angelo GONZALEZ of Philadelphia, PA. RODRIGUEZ Cabrera initially described the vehicle's owner as his brother, but then changed this detail and stated that the vehicle belonged to a friend.

A consent search of the vehicle located a state of Delaware temporary license plate and a bulk amount of USC in a plastic bag in the vehicle's trunk. When questioned about the ownership of the bulk USC, RODRIGUEZ Cabrera requested that Lt. Paschall speak to a subject on his cell phone in reference to the bulk U.S. Currency. Lt. Paschall then spoke with the subject who identified himself as, Rayniel Odalis RODRIGUEZ, the son of RODRIGUEZ Cabrera. Rayniel Odalis RODRIGUEZ, aka Rayniel O. TAVERAS, was unaware of the amount of USC that his father was transporting. TAVERAS was vague and evasive while speaking with Lt. Paschall. For example, TAVERAS provided conflicting answers to questions posed by Lt. Paschall; initially denying the USC was his, and then stating that not all of the USC was his, before stating that the USC was for the purchase of salvaged vehicles. The USC was seized as suspected illicit proceeds. A subsequent official counting determined the amount to be \$36,999.00.

Subsequent investigation determined that Ramon Odalis RODRIGUEZ Cabrera was arrested by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF) in 2007 and charged with drug-related robbery offenses. At that time, RODRIGUEZ Cabrera was utilizing the alias Victor FIGUEROA, and he was arrested under that name. The Toyota Avalon's registrant, Angelo GONZALEZ, was also arrested pursuant to the same investigation and charged with robbery and weapons possession.

In 2012, RODRIGUEZ Cabrera, again using the alias Victor FIGUEROA was arrested by the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (NYOCDESF) pursuant to his participation in another drug-related robbery. RODRIGUEZ Cabrera was convicted of federal drug trafficking conspiracy charges, and sentenced to a term of custody of eighty-four (84) months in a federal correctional institution. Law enforcement databases have linked both RODRIGUEZ Cabrera and Angelo GONZALEZ to the Philadelphia, PA, address where the Toyota Avalon that was transporting the USC was registered.

As noted multiple times in this declaration, the Toyota Avalon's operator, Yunior R. DIAZ Gonzalez, over the course of approximately one year, has been the driver or passenger in three vehicles that have been found to be transporting bulk amounts of USC aggregating over \$190,000.

## X. CONCLUSION

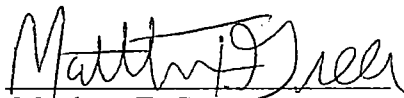
Based on my law enforcement training and experience, traffickers in contraband tobacco products purchase large quantities of cigarettes in source areas for tobacco with low tax rates, such as North Carolina and transport them to high-tax jurisdictions, where they are fraudulently marked and stamped as if they had adhered to the regulatory and tax authorities in those jurisdictions. The cash proceeds from these cigarette sales are then transported across state lines back to the jurisdiction with lower tax rates so that the traffickers can purchase additional quantities of cigarettes, transport them to the high-tax jurisdictions, and thus continue this illicit trafficking venture and the laundering of proceeds thereof.

Federal law defines contraband cigarettes as a quantity in excess of 10,000 cigarettes, which is equivalent to 50 cartons. 18 U.S.C. § 2341. Fifty cartons of cigarettes can be purchased in North Carolina for approximately \$2,800 and sold in higher tax rate jurisdictions such as those typically found in the northeastern United States for a considerable profit. The quantities of cigarettes and amounts of USC that have been interdicted during this investigation all indicate that this organization is trafficking contraband quantities of cigarettes in violation of multiple federal statutes.

Similarly, drug traffickers transport controlled substances northbound and proceeds derived from drug distribution southbound. Previous investigations and seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin; indicate that North Carolina, and other areas of the southeastern United States; have become a significant base of operations for high-level Mexican drug trafficking organizations. After arriving in North Carolina from the southwest border area, multiple kilogram quantities of controlled substances are often sent north via the interstate system to New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and other population centers with high rates of drug abuse. The similarities of the infrastructure, conveyances, distribution networks, and the overall dynamics of drug trafficking and cigarette trafficking activity have resulted in a symbiotic relationship between overlapping criminal organizations, as the contraband cigarette trade has become a convenient vehicle for the laundering of all manner of criminal proceeds, including proceeds derived from the transportation and distribution of controlled substances.

The Toyota Avalon's operator, Yunior DIAZ Gonzalez's links to an active criminal trafficking organization are well documented. Additionally, the inconsistent statements of the occupant of the vehicle, Ramon Odalis RODRIGUEZ Cabrera, and the claimant of the USC, Rayniel Odalis TAVERAS; as well as the violent and drug related criminal history of Ramon Odalis RODRIGUEZ Cabrera and the vehicle's registrant Angelo GONZALEZ, indicate that the USC located in the vehicle are proceeds from trafficking in contraband cigarettes and/or controlled substances, and is, therefore, subject to forfeiture to the United States pursuant to Title 18, U.S.C. section 981(a)(1)(C) and/or Title 21, U.S.C. section 881.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Respectfully submitted this 10<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2023.



Matthew T. Greer

Special Agent

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration